

Significance of Karthigai Deepam



ROWS OF *agal vilakkus* in front of every house... this is the image that at once comes to mind when we think of *Karthigai Deepam* — the festival of lights that is celebrated throughout Tamil Nadu during the month of *Karthigai* (November-December). Not many of us are aware that it is one of the oldest festivals celebrated in the State, perhaps even before people began celebrating Deepavali and Navarathri. Also, unlike many other Hindu festivals, *Karthigai* is basically a Tamil festival and is virtually unknown in most other parts of the country. One of the earliest references to the festival is found in the *Ahananuru*, a book of poems, which dates back to the Sangam Age (200 B.C. to 300 A.D.). The *Ahananuru* clearly states that *Karthigai* is celebrated on the full moon day (*pournami*) of the Tamil month of *Karthigai*. It was one of the most important festivals (*peruvizha*) of the ancient Tamils. Avaiyyar, the renowned poetess

of those times, refers to the festival in her songs. Inscriptions in our temples also refer to the festival. A mid-sixteenth Century inscription at the Arulalaperumal temple in Kancheepuram, refers to the festival as Thiru Karthigai Thirunal. *Karthigai* is essentially a festival of lamps. The lighted lamp is considered an auspicious symbol. It is believed to ward off evil forces and usher in prosperity and joy. While the lighted lamp is important for all Hindu rituals and festivals, it is indispensable for *Karthigai*. There is an interesting story explaining the link between *Karthigai* and lamps. Legend has it that Lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma began to quarrel as to who was the more powerful of the two. While they were fighting, Lord Shiva appeared before them in the form of a huge pillar of fire. Lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma gave up quarrelling and decided to find the top and the bottom of the pillar.

Accordingly, Brahma assumed the form of a swan and moved upwards. Vishnu transformed himself into a boar and started digging deep into the earth. But even after searching for several years, neither of the two was able to find the ends the pillar. Finally, they realised that the pillar was none other than Lord Shiva. Soon afterwards, Lord Shiva appeared as a hill (Arunachala Hill) at Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu. Indeed, the very names `Tiruvannamalai' and `Arunachala' translate as `holy fire hill.' The Shivalinga in the temple here is the *agni linga*. The tiny lamps lit during the *Karthigai* festival (*Karthigai Deepam*) are believed to be the miniature replicas of the fire *linga*. Every year thousands of devotees from Chennai and elsewhere flock to Tiruvannamalai to see the spectacular *Karthigai Deepam* there. The lamps lit on the occasion are of varied sizes, shapes and colours. Traditionally, lamps are lit in temples and *agal vilakkus* would adorn the *thinnaish* of houses. Bigger lamps made of mud; stone and metal were lit inside homes. The ancient Tamils are said to have even imported lamps from as far as Greece and Rome, through the ports of Arikamedu (near Pondicherry), Mallai or Mamallapuram and Mylai or Mylapore (part of present-day Chennai). One such imported lamp was of the hanging variety, designed in the shape of a swan with a fish placed at the top.



Terracotta lamp from Arikamedu. Another variety of lamp, common in Tamil Nadu from early times was the Lakshmi *vilakku* or *Pavai vilakku*. It was shaped like a woman bearing in her folded palms, the *tahali* or shallow bowl containing oil for lighting the lamp. At Arikamedu, archaeologists have unearthed a flat circular clay lamp with four nozzles or petals or openings for four wicks. Another clay lamp discovered at this site has 12 nozzles. The ubiquitous five-nozzle *kuthu vilakku* has been in use from the days of the Cholas or perhaps even earlier. When the British East India Company began to rule parts of South India, it featured the petals or nozzles of the *kuthu vilakku* on some of the coins that were minted. The five petals or nozzles are also said to denote the five main elements are supposed to represent the five elements of Nature — earth, water, fire, air and sky or space. The five nozzles are also said to denote



the five main elements needed for a successful life — health, wealth, learning, courage and longevity. Traditionally, after *Karthigai*, most of these lamps, except for those in daily use, were cleaned and stacked away, and taken out only the next year for the festival. In the old, tiled-roof houses, *agal vilakkus* were invariably stacked in the loft beneath the roof. In recent times, changes in lifestyle and tastes have brought about changes in the lamps used for the festival. Till recently, the humble *agal vilakku* was brought to our doorstep by the lamp-maker himself who carried his fragile wares on his head or on the back of a donkey. People purchased these lamps in dozens. Now, they are packed in colourful boxes and sold in prestigious department stores and handicrafts emporia as also in the annual lamp exhibitions organised in the city by Poompuhar to coincide

with *Karthigai*. Designer clay lamps are becoming popular among the younger generation. These come in exotic shapes and are often decorated with painted designs, colourful stones, beads and zari work. Many modern families in Chennai no longer prefer the oil lamps that stain the floor and the walls. Instead, they use scented candles, including those shaped in the form of the *agal vilakku*. In flats that do not have balconies or open spaces, the single candle lit next to the front door is a testimony to a hoary tradition.

[Thirukarthigai - Recipes - Why & How do we celebrate Karthigai Deepam](#)



Thirukarthigai/Karthigai Deepam comes on the tamil month Karthigai on Pournami day(Full moon day). Throughout the month lamps are lit in the front of the house in the evening. On the Thirukarthigai/Karthigai Deepam day the whole house is decorated with the oil lamps. Thiruvannamalai is famous for Thirukarthigai/Karthigai Deepam.

[Story behind Karthigai](#)

Once Brahma and Vishnu due to the ego started arguing with each other " who is the greatest". Both claimed to be the greatest, instead of doing their duty. At that time the God Shiva appeared in

the form of fire and told them whoever finds the top or bottom of the fire is the greatest. Brahma took the form of Annam (a bird) and tried to find the top of the fire pillar. Vishnu took the form of Varaha (giant pig) and tried to see the bottom of the pillar. As the God has no limit in his size or power, both of them could not see either top or bottom of the fire. When their ego went down and they prayed the God, He appeared before them. The day in which the God appeared as a pillar of fire is Thirukarthigai/Karthigai Deepam.

Lord Shiva appeared as a hill (Arunachala Hill) at Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu. Indeed, the very names 'Tiruvannamalai' and 'Arunachala' translate as 'holy fire hill.' The Shivalinga in the temple here is the agni linga. The tiny lamps lit during the Karthigai festival (Karthigai Deepam) are believed to be the miniature replicas of the fire linga. Every year thousands of devotees from Chennai and elsewhere flock to Tiruvannamalai to see the spectacular Karthigai Deepam there.

This vradha indicates the non measurable infiniteness of the God and shows that the God is the light that will drive away our ignorance. Lamps are lit in the houses to pray His "Jyothi Swarupam".

First day of this festival is called as "Appakarthigai" and the second day is called as "vadai karthigai". All devotees will offer pori, adhirasam, vella Seedai, vetrilai pakku, fruits as neivedhyam for God Shiva.





In down South of Tamilnadu and in Kerala, Hindus will pray god for goodness of their brothers and they will light a elephant lamp (Gajalakshmi Vilaku) which marks as a sign of prosperity and wealth. The story behind lighting elephant lamp (Gajalakshmi Vilaku) is given below

Why we light Elephant lamp on Karthigai ?

Once upon a time there lived a King and he had only one daughter. She loved an elephant which grew with her and she considered the elephant as her own brother. After her marriage she missed her brother elephant very much. So for every Thirukarthigai/Karthigai

deepam occasion, she will light elephant lamp(Gajalakshmi vilaku) and she will prepare tender coconut, elephant leg size milagu Milagu Adai, Pori,Adhirasam,Vella Seedai and keep them as neivedhyam for this festival.

Karthigai Recipies

	<u>Vella Seedai</u>		<u>Karthigai Adai</u>
	<u>Adhirasam</u>		<u>Pori Urundai</u>

Vella Seedai



Ingredients:

Rice - 2 cups

Grated Jaggery - 1.5 Cups

Sesame Seeds - 1 handfull

Grated Cocunut - 5 tablespoon

Cardamom - 1/2 teaspoon

Method:

- Soak the rice and rinse it in water and then spread the rice in a towel till it becomes dry
- Soak the sesame seeds in water for 30mins
- Now grind the rice in a mixer to a nice powder
- Add jaggery in a pan with 1/2 cup of water and when it dissolves its water take it and strain the jaggery water to avoid sand



Vella Seedai Pagu



Pagu with Mixture

- Again boil the jaggery water along with coconut and sesame seeds and keep stirring it until the jaggery comes to one string consistency
- Now remove the jaggery from water and add that to the wet rice powder and mix it well along with cardamom powder.



- Keep this mixture aside for at least one day

- The next day, heat required oil in a heavy bottomed pan
- Make small balls of the vella seedai mixture and drop around 5-6 balls once the oil is hot.
- Deep fry the seedai till it becomes golden color.
- The Delicious Vella Seedai is ready for Neivedhyam for krisnajeyanthi as well as for serving.

[Adhirasam](#)



Ingredients:

Raw Rice	1 Cup
Jaggery	1 Cup
Coconut	Small Piece Chopped
cardamom Powder	1/2 Teaspoon
Cooking Oil	1/4 Litre for deep frying

Method:

- Soak the rice for 30mins and rinse it in water and grind the rice in a mixer to a nice powder
- Add jaggery in a pan with 1/2 cup of water and when it dissolves it water take it and strain the jaggery water to avoid sand
- Again boil the jaggery water and keep stirring it until the jaggery comes to stone consistency. This means when we take a drop of jaggery juice and pour it in water, it should not dissolve rather we should be able to make a ball out of it.
- Now remove the jaggery from flame and add to the wet rice powder and mix it well along with cardamom powder. Now the adhirasam mixture is ready for preparation.
- Keep this adhirasam mixture aside for at least one day



Vella Pagu



Adhirasam Pagu



- The next day, heat required oil in a heavy bottomed pan
- Make a small ball of the adhirasam mixture and place it in a oil greased plastic paper. Spread the mixture like vadai and drop it in oil once the oil is hot.



Adhirasam Ball



Adhirasam - ready to deepfry

- Deep fry the adhirasam till it becomes golden color.
- Repeat the above steps for the rest of mixture
- The Delicious Adhirasam is ready for Neivedhyam for Thirukarthigai/Karthigai deepam as well as for serving.
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Pori Urundai

Aval Pori and Nell Pori are the two famous dishes prepared on the auspicious occasion of Thirukarthigai/Karthigaideepam.



Ingredients:

Aval Pori	4 Cups
Grated Jaggery	1/2 Cup
Finely chopped coconut pieces	2 Tablespoon
Cardamom powder	1 Teaspoon

Method:

- **Add jaggery in a pan with 1/2 cup of water and when it dissolves it water take it and strain the jaggery water to avoid sand.**

- Again boil the jaggery water along with coconut and keep stirring it until the jaggery comes to stone consistency. This means when we take a drop of jaggery juice and pour it in water, it should not dissolve rather we should be able to make a ball out of it.
- Now remove the jaggery from flame and add the Aval pori/Nell Pori and mix it well along with cardamom powder. Now the Aval/Nell Pori mixture is ready.



Vella Pagu



Pori in vella pagu

- Remove this pori mixture and place it in a paper. Make small balls of Aval/Nell pori.



Pori mixed with pagu



Pori ready for Urundai

The delicious Aval/Nell Pori orundai is ready for neivedhyam.

Adai



Ingredients:

Parboiled rice - 2 cups

Raw rice - 1 cup

Urdhal - 3/4 Cup

Channa dhal - 1/4 cup

Green chillies - 5

Red Chillies - 3

Salt - To Taste

Hing - A pinch

Method:

- Soak the rice and dhals in water for 2 hours
- Drain the rice and dhals and grind it in mixer along with chillies and salt and hing
- The adai flour should not be smooth
- Heat the thawa and pour 1 ladle of flour and spread evenly and cook the adai on both the sides till the adai is crisp
- Serve the tasty adai along with Aviyal and Jaggery

Karthigai Adai:

In Brahmin families Adai also one of the neyvedhyam for thirukarthigai. As per the mythological story a princess has to leave an elephant which she considered as her brother when she gets

married and move to her husbands place. So for every Thirukarthigai/Karthigai deepam occasion, elephant lamp(Gajalakshmi vilaku) and she will prepare tender coconut, elephant leg size milagu Milagu Adai, and few more dishes and keep them as neivedhyam for this festival. The recipe is same as the Adai which is given above.

[Kadalai urundai \(Ground nut balls\) for karthigai](#)

Kovil Thiru Karthigai and Thiru Annamalai Deepam. This festival is celebrated mainly in TamizNadu. The festival is celebrated on Poornima (full moonday) of the tamizh month Karthigai. Oil lamps of all shapes and sizes are lit all over the house and the front yard in the evening.



Front yard decorated with lamps.

The neivedyam is usually pori urundai and appam. Orthodox Iyengars make pori (puffed rice) at home using paddy. Dry roasting paddy on a heavy pan allows it to puff and pori is made. I always make groundnut urundai for prasaadam as pori was never easily available in the places I have lived.

Pori urundai or Kadalai urundai the jaggery syrup is very important. Everything becomes easy with practice. So try preparing these traditional sweets without fear.



Kadalai urundai for neivedyam

Ingredients

- Groundnut – 4 cups
- Jaggery – 3 cups
- Cadamom – 6 nos

Method

1. Dry roast the groundnut in MW or on a heavy bottomed pan, till it gives out a nice aroma.
2. Rub the groundnuts well with your palm to remove the skin. Remove the skin completely.
3. In a heavy bottomed pan, grate the jaggery, add 1/2 cup water and boil on a medium flame.

4. Boil till the syrup reaches double thread consistency. To check this, pour a spoonful of syrup into a cup of cold water. If it forms a ball the syrup is ready.
5. Remove the syrup from the stove. Mix the groundnut with the syrup. Allow to cool for around 10 minutes.
6. Shape into balls using a little rice flour, so that the syrup does not stick to your hands.



Kadalai Urundai for Lakshmi and Satish! The hand made chana silk roses adorned lakshmi's dress when she was a young girl!

Karthigai Pori Urundai

Karthigai Deepam is the oldest festival of South India. Falling in the Tamil month of Karthigai. An important festival in the state, the dishes prepared for the occasion are numerous. Karthigai Pori Urundai is one among them.



List of ingredients:

- 1 cup puffed rice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup jaggery powder
- 1 pinch crushed dry ginger
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup coconut pieces
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cardamom powder

Cooking procedure:

1. Clean the puffed rice.
2. Fry the coconut pieces.
3. In a separate vessel, make syrup out of jaggery, adding water until it gets immersed and start heating it. The syrup should become thick enough, so that when you add a drop of it in a vessel of water, it should solidify immediately. When the syrup reaches this stage remove from the stove.
4. Add the puffed rice, dry ginger, coconut pieces and cardamom powder.
5. Mix them well and remove from fire.
6. Then grease your palms with ghee/oil and make the mixture into round medium-sized balls.

Storage Tips:

This urundai stays good for a week.



Ingredients:

Puffed rice	4 & 1/2 Cups(approx)
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Jaggery	1/2 cup
Cardamom	1 no.
Water	as needed
Ghee	to grease ur hands

Method:

1. Powder the jaggery and heat it with water just to immerse it in a broad vessel.



2. After it completely dissolves, filter it in a cloth or metal strainer to remove impurities.
3. Add cardamom powder to it and heat the syrup till it reaches a consistency of rolling ball(I.e;Keep water in a bowl and test the syrup by pouring a few drops in water, it should not dissolve immediately and you should be able to form a loose ball)
4. This is how you can test, I dint roll and show below as I was keen in not missing the consistency;D



5. Do keep the fire in low, when the consistency is about to reach.
6. When you reach the specified consistency, remove immediately and add the puffed rice slowly and mix it. Till you don't find any syrup in the bottom of the vessel. And the mixture should not stick in your hands. If it's too sticky, then you add more puffed rice to it and mix again.



7. Grease both your hands with ghee, and roll tightly into balls of your desired size.
8. *For half cup of jaggery I could make 14 balls, and the measurement of puffed rice is approximate and please add accordingly.*

9. You can add roasted sesame seeds, fried gram dal(pottukadalai) too.

10. At the end, while U are making balls, it will harden...so keep again in stove for a fraction of minute to make it loose and roll again...

Store in an air tight container and enjoy!

Note:

Be sure that your syrup reaches rolling ball consistency, or else you can't make balls!!!

Karthigai Deepam on 21st November - Karthikai Deepam Festival

Thiru Karthigai Deepam, the festival of lights, is celebrated every year in the Tamil month of Karthigai (mid November - mid December). Karthikai Deepam falls on the full moon day of the Karthigai month, coinciding with Krithikai star. Lamps are lit in front of the house in the morning and evening, throughout the month. On the Thirukarthikai day, the entire house is decorated with the oil lamps. This festival of lights indicates the removal of darkness (Ignorance) and enhancing of light (Intelligence). In 2009, Karthigai Deepam Festival falls on 1st December 2009.

The Ritual

On Thirukarthigai, people clean their houses and draw kolams (rangoli) in the front of the house. The lamps are then placed on it. Before that, the lamps (Agal) are placed in the pooja and lighted. Deeparathana is done and the lamps are kept in different places in the house. People of Tamil Nadu celebrate Karthigai Deepam for three days. Some people celebrate it, extending from the Deepavali festival. The number of lamps is doubled every day from the day of Diwali and they end up with numerous lamps on the day of Karthigai Deepam.

History of Karthigai Deepam

Kaarthigai Deepam brings to mind the legend of Lord Muruga who took the form of six babies in a lake called "Saravana Poigai". He was formed from the eyes of Lord Shiva as six flames. These six flames turned into six babies which were united by Goddess Parvati

(his mother) on this day. Special rituals are performed to Lord Muruga on this day.

Significance of the Day

Special light is lit at the top of the hill at Thiruvannamalai which is the abode of Lord Shiva, called as Agni Shetram or Agni Sthalam (one of the five aspects called Panchaboothams). This festival is called as Tiruvannamalai Deepam.





Thiruvannamalai Karthikai Maha Deepam is a festival observed in the Tamil month of Karthikai at famous Tiruvannamalai Arunachaleshwara swamy temple in Tamil Nadu. Thiruvannamalai Karthikai Maha Deepam 2010 date is November 21st. It is celebrated on Kartikai Pournami, the Full Moon day in the month of Kaarthikai. This festival coincides with Krithikai nakshatram. In Thiruvannamalai, Maha Karthigai Deepam is celebrated for 10 days. It is popularly known as Karthikai Brahmotsavam.

On first day of Karthikai Deepam festival, the celebrations begin with Dwajaroohanam. Procession of Lord Chandrasekhara swamy is commenced on the second day during the festival. Surya Vahana seva is performed on the third day. Kamadhenu vahana seva is done on fourth day to Periya Nayagar. On the twelfth day, Karthikai Deepam festival comes to a grand conclusion when Lord Arunachaleshwara is taken out for pradakshina known as Girivalam.

It is also celebrated as the extension of Deepavali. Kartigai Deepam is observed with a lot of gusto and enthusiasm in other temples of Tamil Nadu. The festival is celebrated for three days in the state.

Karthigai Deepam festival is celebrated as Vishnu Deepam in Lord Vishnu temples in Tamil Nadu. This festival is observed as Yanai Pandigai in Mandyam Iyengar community in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka.

